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FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8333
INFO RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA PRIORITY 0441
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 0743
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 0532
RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA PRIORITY 0339
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1267
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 1769
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 1705
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM PRIORITY 0241
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 0485
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1387
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 4354
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0394
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 2280
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 1345
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1894
RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 2455
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 8738
RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES PRIORITY 2616

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SUBJECT: ITALY WELCOMES INITIATIVE ON ETHIOPIA-ERITREA,
SEES SMALL SIGNS OF PROGRESS

REF: STATE 76306

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Jonathan Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Poloffs met with Horn of Africa Office Director Fabrizio Pignatelli June 13 to discuss the Ethiopia-Eritrea boundary impasse and next steps forward, per reftel. Poloffs emphasized the need for practical steps and sought Italian views on the current situation and a late June meeting of interested parties in New York. Pignatelli welcomed the U.S. proposal to meet on the issue in New York, noting that the UN seemed the best forum for the international community to approach the impasse. The GOI thought the appointment of a Special Representative approved by both Ethiopia and Eritrea could revitalize UN efforts, especially since Eritrea seemed more willing to work with the new UN Secretary General. Pignatelli said Italy did not have a candidate in mind. Italy hoped to play an active role in working toward the border demarcation and agreed that a practical approach was the best way forward.

¶2. (C) While Pignatelli was generally pessimistic about prospects for agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, he did note some small signs of opening. In particular, Eritrea seemed more willing to support an active role for UN SYG Ban, Ethiopian President Meles's recent statement to parliament that Ethiopia accepted the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) verdict did not include the usual caveat "in principle," and in a June 8 letter to SYG Ban, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister wrote that Ethiopia accepted the EEBC verdict without preconditions. Pignatelli was cautious about interpreting the statements as a step forward, but thought they might help create a better atmosphere for efforts by the international community--especially if bolstered by the appointment of a new Special Representative. Spogli